



JUNE, 2021: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, USA TO RECEIVE \$1 MILLION TO ESTABLISH PROGRAMME IN JAIN STUDIES



The Department of Religion at the University of Illinois is receiving \$1 million from US based Jain community to establish Jainism as a course of study. The University of Illinois is the 28th school that will develop a Jain studies programme. "I think students campus will respond enthusiastically to this new programme as there is just so much about Jainism that is fascinating and it's so much that students may learn about Jain ideology, said Jon Ebel, Department Head. Universities commonly include Christianity,

Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in their religion studies programmes.

A new effort to expand Jain studies on international campuses started when the International School for Jain Studies opened in India in 2004 at the initiative of Shri Anil Jain, Founder Trustee and President of Ahimsa Foundation (www.jainsamaj.org), New Delhi under the patronage of Dr. S. Cromwell Crawford of University of Hawaii, Department of Religion, Honolulu. Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi then, Minister of Education in Atal Bihari Bajpayee's cabinet blessed the inaugural event in New Delhi. The event was coordinated by Sahu R. P. Jain of Times of India family and attended in large numbers by community leaders representing the all diverse the sectorial ideologies.



The school drew international academic recognition and created scholars of Jainism outside of India. Since then, more than 800 scholars from more than 26 universities have travelled to India for an

Immersion Jainism experience. Now, 17 years after the school was founded in India with the initiative of Ahimsa Foundation in New Delhi, donors have raised close to \$18 million to donate to schools across the world to establish programs. The Department of Religion at the University of Illinois is the third school in the Midwest that will launch a program (the other two in the Midwest are the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin-Madison). With the donation, the department will request that a tenure stream position be established for a faculty member who will specialize in Jainism. Two faculty members already in the department are also interested in furthering lessons about Jainism in their classes. The department also hopes to create a post doctoral or non-tenure stream faculty member position to start building a curriculum for Jainism.



The donors have also begun conversations with schools overseas in New Zealand, Israel and Belgium. The initial conversations with the University of Illinois began about nine months ago. "We usually look for the universities and places where we have some connections with the Jain community in that area or we have some lead," said Jasvant Modi, a donor who has pledged about \$13 million total to establish Jain studies in higher education. Prior to offering funding to universities, the donors examine the school's religion offerings to see what was already being offered. One of the coordinators for the effort, Nitin Shah, an anaesthesiologist and intensivist, works to bridge the gap between the universities

and donors. Shah said he has been an academician all his life and currently teaches anaesthesiology and critical care at Loma Linda University. Prof. Jon Ebel said that they were grateful for the group's generosity.

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